



others injured in blaze

## Collapsed wall kills fireman



Two firemen were injured and one killed when the west wall collapsed and fell on them.  
(Sentinel photo by Mark Copier)

By Bob Niedt  
Sentinel Reporter

A Holland fireman was killed and two others were injured when a wall collapsed early this morning at a major fire that totally destroyed a warehouse and mold and engineering facility at 919 South Washington Ave. on Holland's south side.

Steven Cook, 30, of 621 West 24th St., died in Holland Community Hospital from skull injuries after a wall of the warehouse of the Holland Mold and Engineering Co. and Baus Products building fell forward on firemen without warning at about 7:15 a.m. as they battled a raging fire.

Two other firemen, Earl Barkel, 46, of 31 Holly Court and Randy Simmons, 24, of 449 West 32nd St., were injured as they tried to escape the collapsing wall. Barkel and Simmons were admitted to Holland Hospital where both were reported in good condition.

A cause of the fire and damage estimates were not immediately known, and state fire marshals were expected to be called in today. It was the first time in about 40 years a Holland fireman was killed in the line of duty.

The fire was discovered by an employee of Holland Mold and Engineering at who was reporting for work to turn on mold machines at 6 a.m. The heat was reportedly so intense the employee couldn't even open the door.

Firemen had been battling the blaze for nearly one hour along the north side of the building from the ground and by using the 85-foot aerial tower but minutes before the west wall collapsed some firemen left the north side and went to the Washington Ave. side of the building.

Around 7:15, six firemen were pouring water through a half-raised garage door on the Washington Ave. or southwest side of the building when, without warning, a 14-foot tall section of wall fell forward. The firemen were standing about five feet from the building when the collapse occurred.

The warehouse facility had continually burst into flames as fire raged through the stored flammable plastics, which were owned and manufactured by Holland Mold and Baus Products, a division of Altra Mold Corp. of Chicago.

Cook was apparently struck by a steel I-beam. The other firemen and a reporter and photographer who were standing near the building scrambled for safety when Barkel and Simmons were trapped by the debris.

Holland police and firemen frantically tried to clear away the rubble of cinderblocks, brick, steel and mangled fire hoses to aid their companions. Fire officials, unclear if anyone else was trapped in the ruins, quickly checked a

list to make sure all the firefighters were accounted for.

The three men were given emergency aid at the scene and rushed to Holland Hospital where Cook was later pronounced dead.

After the collapse, crackling, burning electrical wires from power poles to what was left of the wall fell to the ground shooting off sparks.

Flames shot 120 feet and more into the air and thick, black smoke poured out of the building up to an hour after firemen began pouring water on the flames. Roofs and walls caving in sounded like mini-explosions.

The intense fire was fed by plastic injection molds and silk screens used by the companies. Holland Mold and Engineering makes the plastic injection molds for Baus Products, which in turn makes piano keys and plastic football helmets used as lamp shades and planters. Both companies are subsidiaries of Altra Mold.

The building was being leased by the two companies from Harold Tanis.

Stacked cartons of some of the products were packed in the warehouse and some of the products were on display in a showroom next to the warehouse.

The building was Holland Mold and Engineering's second facility, and was mostly used for warehousing with some production in the rear portion of the building. Baus Products had a showroom and offices in the northwest portion of the building.

The other Holland Mold and Engineering facility is located at 835 Washington Ave.

DeWyn Van Tongeren, manager of Holland Mold and Engineering, said the burned building was storing plastic molding for Holland Mold's other plant.

"The place was just loaded with the stuff," Van Tongeren said. "But that isn't the important thing. That can be replaced. I'm just so sorry about the fireman."

Altra Corp. is headed by George Anderson and his son, Glenn, who lives in Wyoming and oversees the running of the companies. Both men were notified of the fire and came to Holland.

Glenn Anderson said about 15 persons worked in the plant which burned, although no one was in the building at the time of the fire. He said the company had just cut back continuous production last month.

Anderson said the company sells the plastic molds and products wholesale to larger companies.

Several other walls around the perimeter of the building collapsed during the course of the fire, but most of them collapsed into the building. The walls that trapped firemen fell forward.

Stunned firemen continued to fight the blaze after their fellow workers were taken to the hospital. Word of Cook's death reached firemen as they attempted to douse flash fires.

"You risk something like this every time you go out," one firefighter said as he fought back tears. "But you never learn to accept it. Never."

Cook had worked full time with the department since October, 1976, and had been a volunteer since August, 1974. He was assigned to the new Central fire station.

Around 9 a.m., after the fire had been contained, firemen left for a brief memorial service for Cook. They were forced to return to the scene of the tragedy one hour later as small fires broke out.

Today's fire was the second major fire in Holland in less than a week, and the first fire since the late 1930's when a fireman was killed on the way to a fire.

A \$500,000 fire destroyed the First United Methodist Church on West 10th St. early last Wednesday. No injuries were reported.

## Steven D. Cook, Holland firefighter

Steven D. Cook, 30, of 621 West 24th St., a firefighter for the Holland fire department, died from head injuries early this morning when a wall collapsed on him as he fought the Holland Mold and Engineering building fire.

He was taken to Holland Community Hospital where he was later pronounced dead.

Cook was the first firefighter to be killed in the line of duty since about 1937 when Russell Risselada died in a traffic accident after the fire engine he was driving collided with a car.

Cook joined the fire department as a full time firefighter in October, 1976. He had been a volunteer fireman since August, 1974.

Surviving are his wife, Tanya K., a

daughter, Heather; his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Donald A. Cook of Zeeland; his parents-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Charles B. Ter Horst of Holland; his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. James H. Kijmparens of Holland and Thomas Bubar of Maine; a brother, Brian Cook of Holland, three sisters, Mrs. Douglas (Joan) Windemüller of Holland and Sheryl and Diane Cook at home.

He was a veteran of Vietnam, serving in the U.S. Navy.

Services will be held Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. from Christ Memorial Reformed church with pallbearers from the Holland Fire Department.

Friends may call at the Notter-Ver Lee-Langeland Chapel Tuesday from 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m.



Amid rubble of the wall, a fireman gives aid to an injured colleague.  
(Sentinel photo by Mark Copier)



Steven D. Cook

## Inside

### Stinging Victory

The Hope College Flying Dutchmen took the sting out of the Kalamazoo Hornets basketball squad Saturday night, defeating them 78-74.

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### Weather

Today mostly cloudy with chance of a few snow flurries. High lower to mid 30s. Tonight and Tuesday mostly cloudy. Low tonight near 20. High Tuesday near 30.

Story ... page 2

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# Editorial Commentary

Steven D. Cook

We humans can never understand nor comprehend that twisted, confusing and final chapter of life.

Death never gives us warning. God, the Supreme Being, or whatever we in our simple earthly minds may call the Creator, has made it that way. And when death strikes someone in the prime of his life, this reason for being becomes even more baffling.

Steven D. Cook, a man who devoted his life to protecting others, was only 30 years old when his world came crashing down on him. A wall suddenly collapsed during the tragic fire at the Holland Mold and Engineering and Baus Products building Monday as he and other firefighters attempted to extinguish the raging fire.

His family, friends, comrades and acquaintances have cried all the tears and probed their souls trying to understand the meaning of this seemingly senseless death.

There is no simple answer.

There is no magical or scientific potion to pour on the human mind to come up with the proper response to why.

We must cry the tears. We must damn what can only be called fate for taking his life, for his being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And we must be satisfied that it was Steven's time to move on to what we hope will be a better life for him.

But neither can we forget Steven. That would be a crime worse than his tragic death. We look to his fellow firefighters, his wife and child to carry on his name, telling those who may forget what Steven did for those he loved, in the city and in his own private circle. We, as the public, seeing Steven as the man he was, carry his name on our tongues, in our hearts, and see him as a brave man who died protecting us.

It was the supreme sacrifice that Steven Cook paid. Fellow firefighters from throughout the state, police officers and the public paid tribute to this man in their own humble ways at Steven's funeral or in private thoughts.

In our own way, we have all paid him tribute. We have shed the tears, maybe keeping them inside, and let our hearts go out to his family and friends.

Steven Cook epitomizes a real purpose for life. As confusing and heartbreaking as it may be sometimes, we carry on, caring for each other.

Steven Cook cared. He died caring. But he will never, never be forgotten.

We salute him and are proud for what his all-too-short life stood for.

## Church News

### A firefighter's prayer

Dear Lord:

We call upon You for strength and guidance.

Look kindly upon us in our needs.

Teach us to look always to You for assistance, as our fellow citizens look to us.

Give us courage, that we may impart courage to others.

Make us studious, and give us pride and joy in our work.

When the gong sounds, calling us to duty, give us speed and efficiency.

As our siren wails, ride with us through the city streets, shielding us from danger.

On the fire scene, may our officers and men always work as an honorable, courageous and victorious team.

Walk with us through the terror of flame and explosion.

May our hearts be always ready if we should be summoned before our Eternal Chief in the midst of our labors.

Through our ministrations to our suffering fellowmen, we dedicate our lives humbly to Your praise and glory.

In joy or sorrow, we ask only that You may be pleased with our service, that then the Last Alarm shall have sounded for us, we may receive our eternal assignment with You.

AMEN

Author unknown

COOK - We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the community, city council, fire department, police department, sheriff department, and paramedics in the tribute paid to our son, husband, father, and brother, Mr. Steven D. Cook. We especially wish to thank the Rev.'s Doeden, Wilcox, and Kimmons for their words of comfort. Also the firemen who waited at the hospital to console us. The deeds of kindness at this time are unnumbered, but greatly appreciated.

Mrs. Steven Cook and Heather  
Mr. & Mrs. Donald Cook and family

Mr. & Mrs. Charles Ter Horst and family

Mr. & Mrs. James H. Klompars



# Church News

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**Teach us to look always to You for assistance, as our fellow citizens look to us.**

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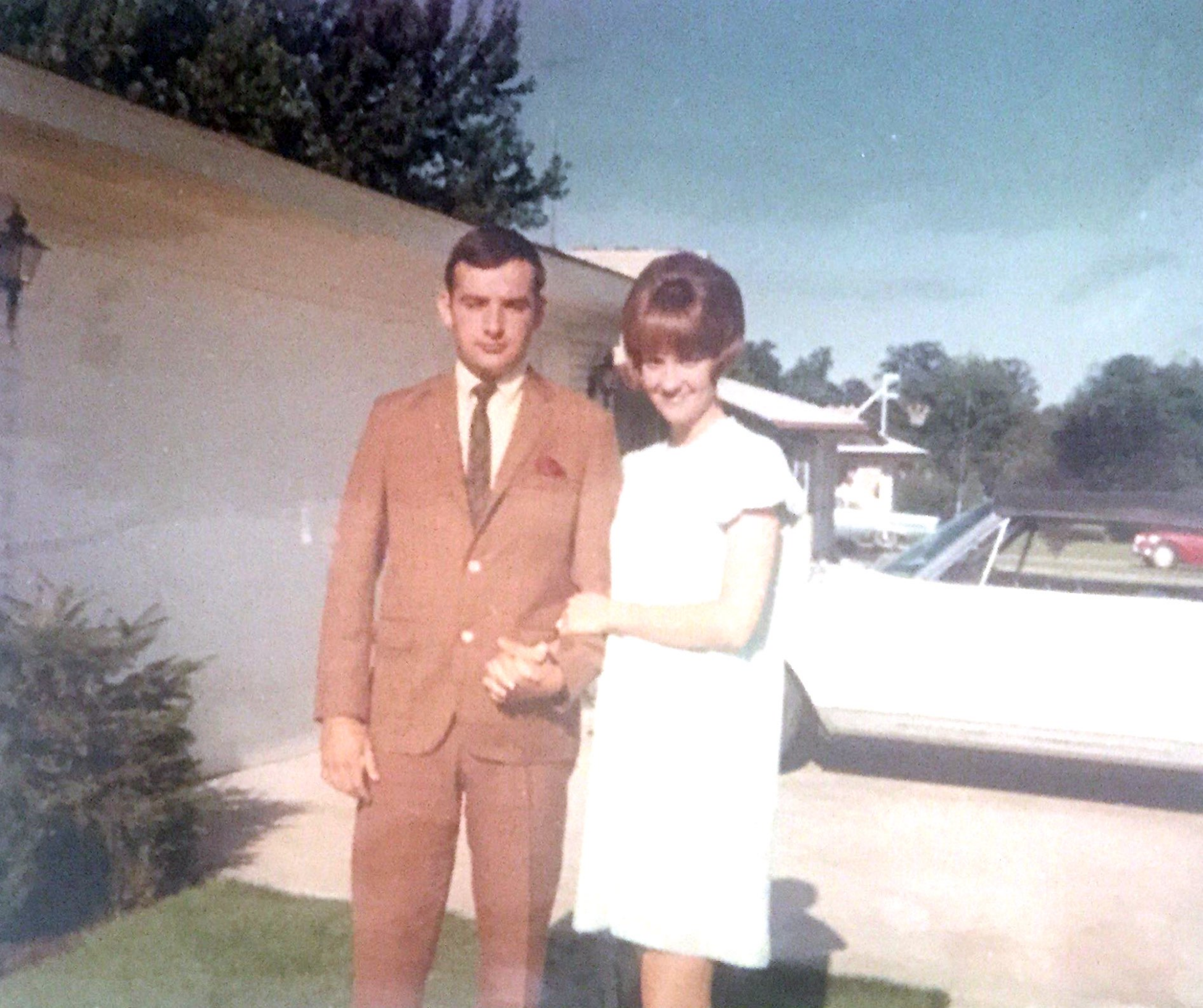
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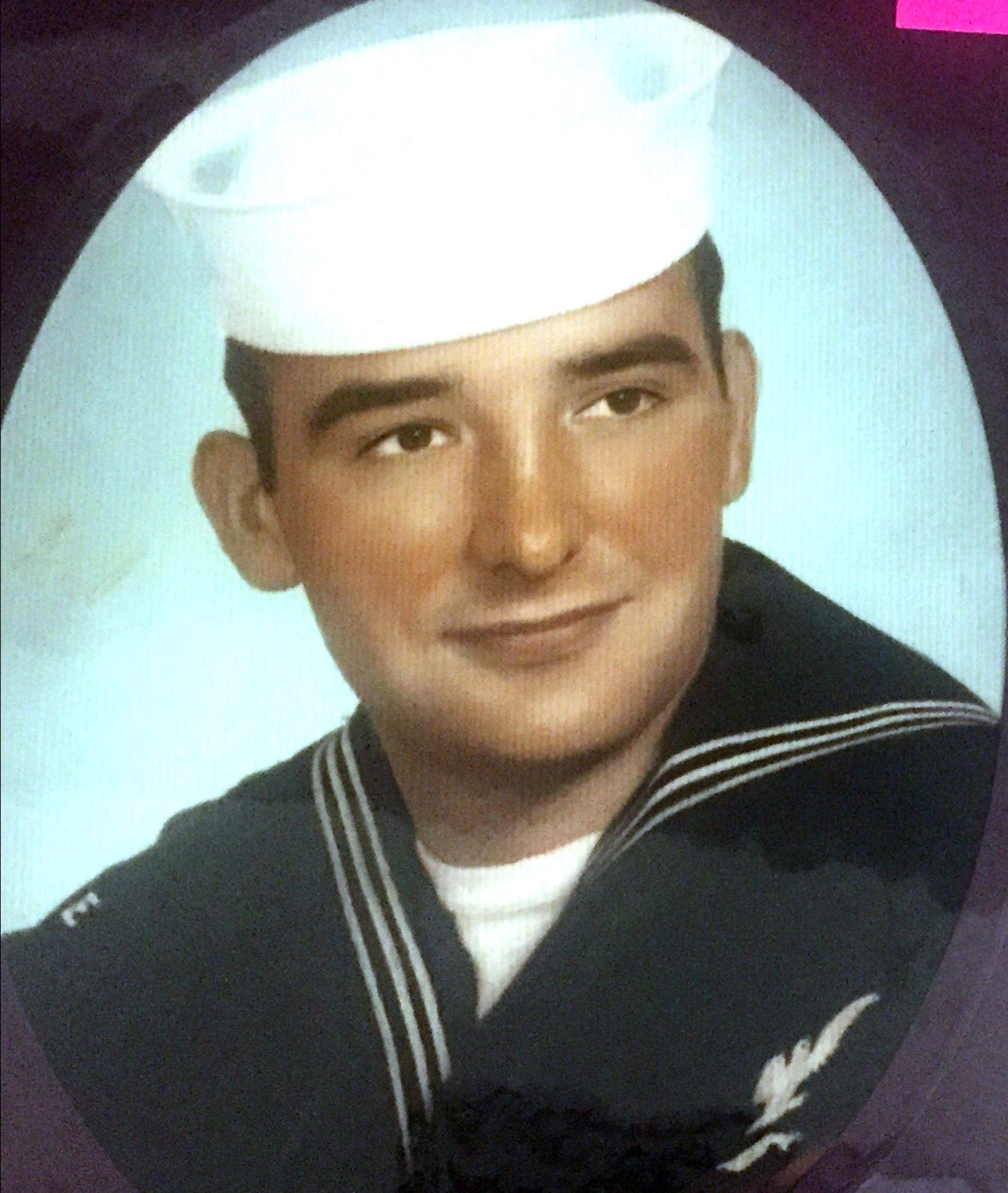
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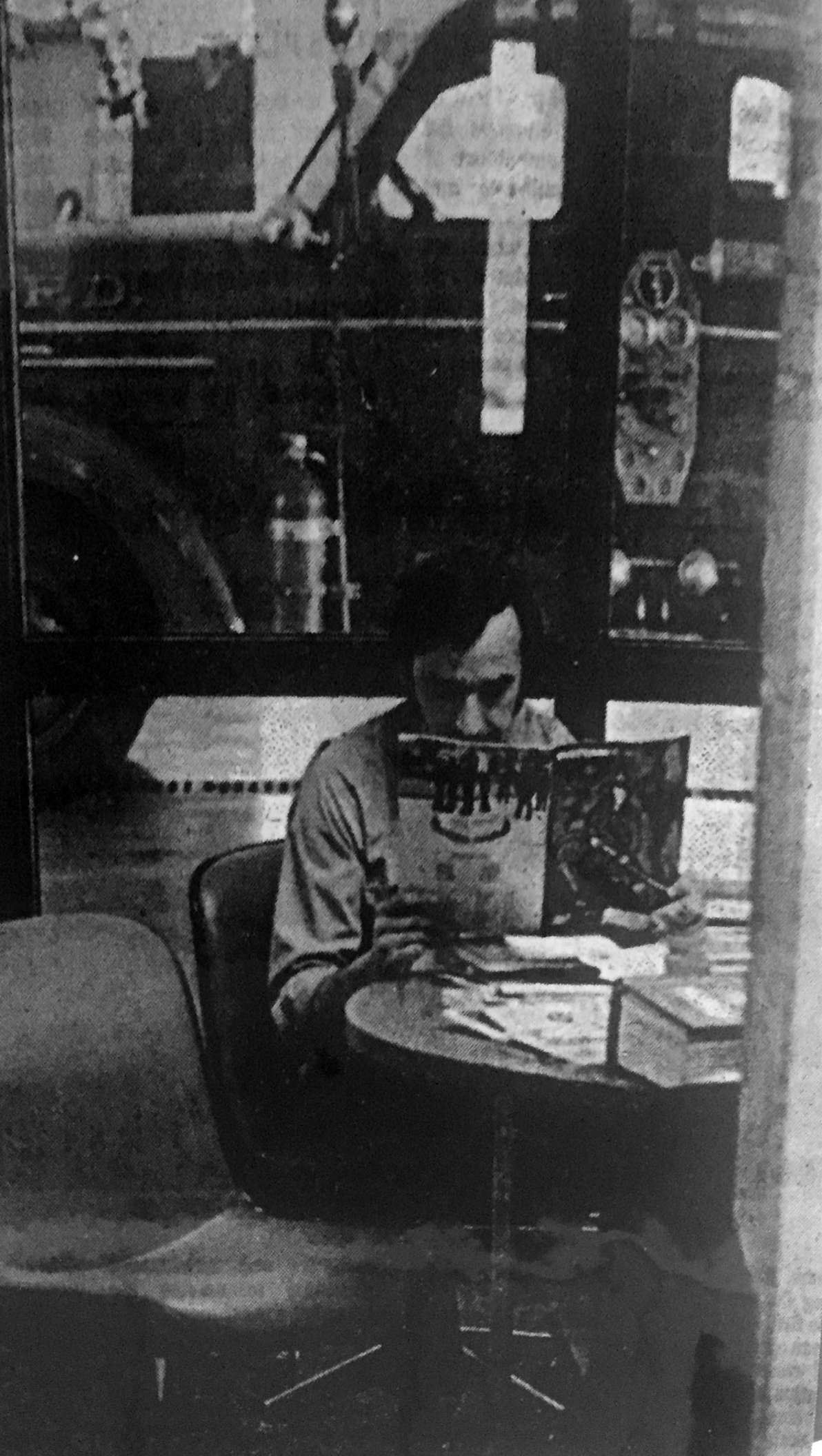
**Author unknown**























# City of Holland

HOLLAND, MICHIGAN

CHIEF  
L. MARVIN MOKMA

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
CENTRAL STATION  
279 KOLLEN PARK DRIVE  
(616) 392-1485

DEPUTY CHIEF  
JOHN DU MEZ

INSPECTOR  
DALE L. MYAARD

February 2, 1979

Mr. & Mrs. Donald Cook  
516 W. Lawrence  
Zeeland, Michigan 49423

Dear Don and Mary Ellen:

It is most difficult for me to begin this letter to you. Our friendship goes back so many years with Don and I in school together and then our children playing together, Steve having been at our home many times with Larry.

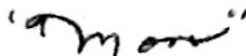
As I indicated to both of you a year or so ago at Holiday Inn, Steve was one of my most valued employees. He was a good worker, an aggressive firefighter and I regarded him as a personal friend. I can say to you as I am sure you are fully aware, Steve loved his work. He was truly dedicated to his calling.

Don and Mary, on behalf of every member of this department and Dolores and I, we just cannot put into words our feeling of remorse for each of you and your family.

Our prayer for you is that God may grant you the strength to endure as you mourn your son.

If I or any member of our Department can do anything to ease your burden or help in any way, please call on us.

With kind personal regards,



L. Marvin Mokma, Chief  
Holland Fire Department

LMM:bjs



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 1, 1979

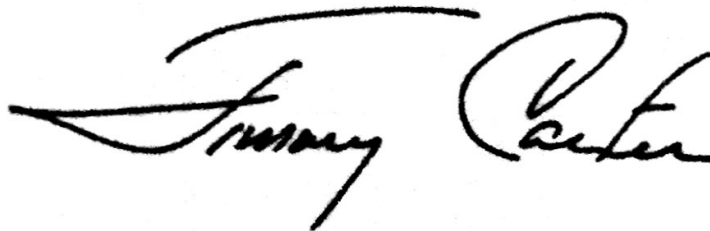
To Tanya Cook

I was deeply saddened to learn of your husband's death, and you and your family are very much in my thoughts at this time.

The tragedy of Steven Cook's death in the line of duty touches us all. He has my lasting admiration for his dedication to the safety and protection of his fellow citizens, a cause for which he made the highest sacrifice.

May God strengthen and sustain you in the difficult days ahead. You have my prayers and heartfelt sympathy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jimmy Carter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "J" and a distinct "Carter" at the end.

Mrs. Steven Cook  
621 West 24th Street  
Holland, Michigan 49423



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## Inside





**MEMBERS OF HOLLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT BEAR FLAG-DRAPED CASKET OF FIREMAN STEVEN D. COOK**  
(Sentinel photos by Mark Copier)